

LESSONS FROM THE FIELD

How Can We Work Together?

Principles for Effective Alliances in Conservation

Conservation is a truly complex undertaking that requires a wide range of people and organizations working together to achieve common goals. Often, alliances are formed among local, national, and international organizations. They can also be formed among nongovernmental conservation, development, and research organizations, government agencies, and other groups. But what are the most strategic relationships we can build to achieve conservation? What are the most efficient ways of working together across the spectrum of organizations and institutions involved in conservation and related activities? What makes for the most effective alliances in conservation? These are the issues that the Biodiversity Support Program (BSP) sought to address in its recent research into the role of nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) in conservation.

The BSP study was designed to look at two overarching questions.

1. What are the characteristics of effective conservation alliances and their member organizations?
2. What are key principles that can help organizations work together more effectively?

We use the term *alliance* to broadly describe a formal arrangement between organizations, created to implement some set of project activities designed to achieve specific, on-site conservation goals. Alliances can take on different forms including

- **A contractual agreement.** Occurs when a primary organization hires another organization to complete specific tasks and work.
- **A partnership.** Involves only two organizations that have agreed to work together on a specific project or to achieve a particular, mutually beneficial goal.



The Biodiversity Support Program

The Biodiversity Support Program's mission is to promote conservation of the world's biological diversity. Our work focuses primarily in Africa and Madagascar, Asia and the Pacific, Eastern Europe, and Latin America and the Caribbean. We work with communities and local, national, and international nongovernmental organizations, as well as government agencies, bilateral and multilateral organizations, academic institutions, and donors to support conservation and development initiatives that address both social and environmental needs.

By reviewing our work from around the world and in consultation with our partners, we have identified five critical conditions for success in biodiversity conservation. We believe that all of these conditions must be met in order to reach conservation goals. These conditions form the framework for BSP's *Lessons from the Field* series, which is designed to share with other practitioners what we have learned from the projects we support. Each issue of the *Lessons from the Field* series focuses on one of the five critical conditions and is based primarily on interviews of BSP staff. Where appropriate, we go beyond our own projects and interview other BSP partners.

BSP's Five Conditions for Success

1. Clarity of conservation goals and objectives
2. Equitable and effective social processes and alliances for conservation
3. Appropriate incentives for biodiversity valuation and conservation
4. International, national, and local policies supportive of conservation
5. Sufficient awareness, knowledge, and capacity to conserve biodiversity

This issue addresses Condition #2, using the results of BSP's recent publication, *In Good Company: Effective Alliances for Conservation*, as a framework. At the end of this issue, we also include some guiding questions designed to be asked by project managers as they consider getting involved in an alliance.

DOING CONSERVATION BETTER

BSP's Analysis and Adaptive Management Program

- **A consortium.** Includes three or more organizations working together on specific projects involving joint liability and joint decision making.

The BSP study looked at the 20 alliances funded by the **Biodiversity Conservation Network (BCN)**. BCN was established to test a community-based enterprise approach to conservation in Asia and the Pacific. BCN partners engaged primarily in ecotourism, non-timber forest product (NTFP) enterprises, and other income-generating projects.

For final results of the BCN project, see Salafsky, N., B. Cordes, J. Parks, and C. Hochman. 1999. Evaluating linkages between business, the environment, and local communities: Final analytical results from the Biodiversity Conservation Network. Washington, D.C.: Biodiversity Support Program. Available on the Web at www.BSPonline.org.

Many of the results of our study ran against the conventional wisdom on effective conservation alliances. For

example, we found that alliances with fewer member organizations were generally more effective; local and national development organizations were more successful than international conservation organizations at implementing conservation projects; and funding amount was not a good predictor of conservation success.

If you find that these results leave you with more questions than answers, read the full publication, Margoluis, R., C. Margoluis, K. Brandon, and N. Salafsky. 2000. In good company: Effective alliances for conservation. Washington, D.C.: Biodiversity Support Program (available in print or on the Web) ... or the complete literature review, Margoluis, C. 2000. The role of NGOs in conservation. A literature review for In good company: Effective alliances for conservation. Washington, D.C.: Biodiversity Support Program. To read these documents on the Web or download them, visit www.BSPonline.org.

Principles for Effective Alliances

Based on the analysis of the 20 BCN alliances, the BSP study suggests seven main principles for achieving effective alliances in conservation. For each of these principles, we include the results of the study and relevant observations from BSP staff working on other projects across our portfolio.

Create simple alliances.

Simple alliances are easier to manage than more complex ones and they can achieve greater conservation impact. Having more organizations in an alliance means more skills and resources, but it also means increased complexity and the chances for more problems. Organizations in an alliance can combine skills and even contract out specific tasks if needed. If an alliance must include many different member organizations, make especially sure that project goals are clear and the role of each organization has been clearly defined.

The Central African Regional Program for the Environment (CARPE) supports work to identify and prioritize threats to biodiversity in the Central African region and invests in building the capacity of national organizations to effectively manage their countries' resources. The project links a core group of U.S. partners, including government agencies and NGOs, to Central African NGOs, individuals, and government agencies.

Laurent Somé, CARPE Manager, agrees that simple alliances are generally more effective, but he notes that project managers and organizations don't always have a choice of partners. According to Somé, "In CARPE, we had to work with U.S.-based organizations



In the Douala Mangroves, CARPE grantees conducted a biological survey of the area to determine the rate and amount of deforestation. In order for this work to be successful, CARPE staff, the local implementing NGO, and community members know they must work together.

that had agreements with USAID to work in the Central African region. In the CARPE case, the alliance was determined by the donor and you have to take this into account. So if you have the choice, simple is better, but you have to be flexible and work within the given situation.” Somé discovered that, although it was crucial for all CARPE partners to remain focused on the overall goals of the alliance, work progressed much more smoothly once CARPE partners organized into smaller sub-alliances that worked on specific and more operationally manageable themes relevant to the conservation issues in the region.

Allow for decision making at the appropriate levels.

Alliances are most successful when they leave decision making related to project design and management to those organizations most involved in implementation. Keep decision-making authority in the hands of as few organizations as possible. Streamline decision making as well so that the project does not get bogged down because there are too many people involved in making simple decisions. Make sure that all members of the alliance know who has decision-making authority.

Kaa-Iya Park in the Gran Chaco region of southern Bolivia is the largest terrestrial park in South America, covering a total of 34,411 square kilometers. Under BSP's **People, Forests, and Reefs (PeFoR)** project, Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS), the Center for the Support of Native Lands (Native Lands), and Capitanía del Alto y Bajo Izozog (CABI), formed an alliance to help community members map their own lands. WCS has a long-term partnership with CABI – a representative federation that



M. Chapin

BSP's Peoples, Forests and Reefs (PeFoR) program provided support to Wildlife Conservation Society, Center for the Support of Native Lands, and Capitanía del Alto y Bajo Izozog for a community-based mapping process that provided essential information for protected area management plans. The program also trained participants for future wildlife survey work.

serves as the local government for the indigenous Izoceño people who live around the park – to help it establish and manage Kaa-Iya. WCS and CABI invited Native Lands to provide short-term technical assistance during the mapping exercise.

According to Janis Alcorn, Director of BSP's **Asia and Pacific Program** and Manager of **PeFoR**, decision making was collaborative but the project was managed by CABI. “CABI was responsible for overall project management decisions and ensured that communities controlled the process. Native Lands offered technical advice based on their own experience with mapping in other areas. And WCS provided the administrative framework for the mapping activity.” She adds, “By keeping major decisions in the hands of the community representatives, CABI ensured that the project met their objectives.” This is a good example of how alliance members can work together

effectively to facilitate decision making at appropriate levels.

Secure strong leadership.

Alliances are more effective when there is a single, capable leader rather than a number of leaders from several organizations competing for authority. Look for charismatic leaders when starting a project, but train others to lead as well. By training other individuals to be leaders, there is a greater likelihood that projects can continue to function smoothly with or without specific individuals.

BSP's **KEMALA** program in Indonesia supports more than 25 organizations, forming individual partnerships with each, and also providing an opportunity for the organizations to get to know each other as a network. Nonette Royo, Senior Program Officer for KEMALA, agrees that strong leaders are crucial – as long as they don't dominate too much. Royo believes that when there is no strong leader, for example,



LATIN (Indonesian Tropical Institute)

In a workshop to discuss the establishment of “village information systems” in Ujung Kulon National Park, West Java, a KEMALA partner encourages participants to explain the results of small group discussions to the larger group. Individual cards are used to record issues about which the villagers would like more information from the “village information systems.” The cards are divided into those that represent issues related to the Ujung Kulon National Park and those that do not.

an organization can more easily get caught in a “paralysis of consultation.” Once paralyzed, a leaderless organization has no one person to act as a catalyst to get things moving along again.

Royo describes an alliance in West Kalimantan that is blessed with a strong, capable leader. This alliance includes 15 different organizations working together. “[The leader] is a guiding force: he doesn’t really control the operations of the organizations and is actually only active in two or so, but he is kind of a father figure and he keeps everyone working together.” Patrick Maguire, also on the **BSP Asia and Pacific Program** team adds, “He

has now trained others in the organization to lead – and is still present and provides overall guiding leadership.” Yes, strong leadership is essential, but planning for future leadership is equally important.

Negotiate and maintain clear project goals.

Without clear goals, chances are that the alliance will not be successful. Take whatever time is necessary, right when the alliance is formed, to discuss, negotiate, and document the goals of the alliance. If it is too difficult to arrive at mutually acceptable goals, stop – do not continue into the design or implementation phase of the project. Instead of ignoring differences and thinking

that it will all work out later, reconsider your partners in the alliance – it probably means that at least one organization should not be a part of the alliance.

Bruce Leighty and Tatiana Zaharchenko worked together on BSP’s **Conservation Needs Assessment in Crimea** (Ukraine) project. Leighty and Zaharchenko found that not only should you clearly define and maintain project goals, but you must also be clear about the motivations driving your goals and communicate these interests openly to other potential project partners. According to Leighty, “Attaining clear goals on the priority-setting exercise was difficult at first. We were trying to gain acceptance for a project that most of the people did not truly understand – as the concept of priority setting was so foreign.” What proved to be most important was not just to have clear goals but to make sure the goals were transparent. Leighty continues, “We really had to work to gain the trust of the people; by being very up front and honest about our goals for the project, and by being consistent, we were able to gain this trust.”



B. Leighty

The Conservation Needs Assessment Workshop, known as the Gurzuf Workshop, sought to facilitate an open and transparent discussion among relevant stakeholders in Crimean and central government agencies, scientific institutions, and NGOs about the status of threats facing Crimea’s biodiversity and actions needed to conserve it.

Zaharchenko adds, “The fact that we would spend our time there to promote conservation goals seemed like a foreign idea – and there was a lot of suspicion that we had a hidden agenda – so being clear on our objectives became the foundation that we kept coming back to, explaining our goals every time we encountered a new group we might work with.”

Define and maintain clear roles and responsibilities.

Clear roles and responsibilities are extremely important to ensure that each organization is aware of and comfortable with its part in the alliance. The more complex the alliance is, the more important it is to make sure that all member organizations understand and agree to their roles. Maximize your organization’s role in the project according to the skills and resources you have. While local and national organizations are often better at implementing field projects, international organizations should play a supportive role, focusing on policy, training, technical assistance, and fundraising.

According to Royo, KEMALA has worked hard to keep roles and responsibilities within the KEMALA network as clear as possible. The KEMALA core team does not present itself as another independent project that may advocate a competing position within the network. Instead, it supports the member organizations and their individual positions. “Government hears proposals from a member organization or the entire network and not from the KEMALA core team,” reports Royo. The core team plays a purely supportive role to the network, and the division of labor remains very clear.

In the CARPE project, Somé notes that it is important for each member in the alliance to know its role, but it is equally important that all members know the roles and responsibilities of the other member organizations. Somé stresses the importance of accountability in the alliance. “Good faith is simply not enough. You need to have a contractual agreement of some sort to ensure accountability. When you are setting up the alliance, you need to have a provision that requires this – something that is somehow binding.”

Somé adds, “Someone also has to have the power to enforce accountability. We have learned this as a major lesson, and so, for the next phase, the CARPE consortium unanimously agreed to include text in the new agreements with USAID that would oblige each partner to a firm commitment to the rest of the alliance without solely relying on good intentions.”

Be prepared to adapt to changes in the project.

Alliances need to be able to adapt to the changes in the project as needed. They also need to be able to withstand unforeseen natural, social, political, or economic crises that may come along. Alliances must be resilient to

changes in alliance membership over time as well.

In 1993, USAID/Haiti requested BSP’s help in protecting 2,000 hectares of remaining natural habitat in the Pic Macaya National Park from further degradation and encroachment, while providing technical assistance on sustainable development activities to local communities residing in the Park’s 15,000 hectare buffer zone. BSP, in turn, worked in partnership with a local agricultural cooperative, the Union des Coopératives de la Région Sud d’Haiti (UNICORS), and had contractual agreements with the Centre de Formation et d’Encadrement Technique (CFET) and the University of Florida to promote



P. Monaghan/U. Flock

In 1983, Pic Macaya, Haiti’s highest mountain peak in the southwest peninsula, was declared Pic Macaya National Park by the government of Haiti. Ten years later, USAID/Haiti solicited BSP’s assistance in protecting the park from further degradation and encroachment. BSP in turn worked with UNICORS and CFET to promote sustainable management practices in the park.

sustainable development activities in the region.

According to Ilana Locker, former Senior Program Officer in the **Latin America and Caribbean Program**, “The flexibility and patience of the alliance partners were tested soon after the start of the project. Because of the U.S. embargo on non-humanitarian aid imposed in 1994, many planned project activities were basically put on hold for over a year. Regular communication, though, between the alliance partners meant that, although momentum was lost, the project did not have to start from scratch when the U.S. embargo was lifted in 1995.”

Similarly, CARPE’s Somé emphasizes the need for alliances to be flexible – not only in constantly changing areas of war and conflict, but also in times of peace. “You need to adapt to changes in the project because of the conflicts around you,” he says, “but you also have to be ready for the peace process – to be a part of it and take advantage of new policy opportunities.”

Strengthen management capacity within the alliance.

Regardless of who is in charge of the major administrative tasks in the project, work on building the management,

decision-making, and administrative capacity of the smaller organizations in the alliance. Make sure the transfer of necessary skills is planned for at the very beginning of the formation of the alliance.

Judy Oglethorpe, BSP’s Executive Director and Director of the **Africa and Madagascar Program**, has found that building basic administrative and project management capacity in less-experienced alliance partners is particularly important. In the CARPE project, Somé and CARPE field staff have focused attention on providing training to CARPE country partner NGOs in proposal writing, grant management, and other necessary administrative skills.

According to Oglethorpe, “There are two main constraints that CARPE faces in helping to achieve conservation in Central Africa. First, there are relatively few well-established local African NGOs; finding an appropriate partner can be difficult. Second, the NGOs that are up and running often have low capacity to receive and manage grants. And so we have to make it a priority to strengthen the local organizations – our partners – in order to work together more effectively. Often, if you expect an organization to play a useful and functional role – one that is

agreed to by all partners – then you need to strengthen its ability to do so.” Somé agrees: “Investing in administrative and management capacity is important if you want all the organizations in an alliance to fully participate in the process. If the organizations are to have a significant role they must be able to do it.”

Conclusion

Our main conclusions on alliances, as presented in our recent publication, *In Good Company: Effective Alliances for Conservation*, are straightforward: simple is better, clarity of goals is the starting point, and member organizations need to play appropriate roles to be effective. Ultimately, the goal of our study was to better understand the characteristics of successful conservation alliances and thus improve the chances of achieving conservation success. While the principles we present here and illustrate with examples from across the BSP portfolio are not meant to be a recipe that guarantees success, we hope that they serve you as basic guidelines to build healthier, more effective conservation alliances. ■

BSP’s Portfolio in Analysis and Adaptive Management

Our research and analysis portfolio of six projects was designed to address BSP’s Five Conditions for Conservation Success.

- Adaptive Management of Conservation and Development Projects
- Decentralization and Partnerships for Biodiversity Conservation

- Health Incentives for Biodiversity Conservation
- Institutional Arrangements: the Role of Nongovernmental Organizations (NGOs)
- Setting Biodiversity Conservation Priorities: Approaches and Impacts

- The Role of Sustainable Agriculture in the Conservation of Biodiversity

Each AAM project results in at least one major publication documenting the research and results for the conservation community. These publications will be released on the Web at **www.BSPonline.org** and in hard copy over the coming months. ■

Considering Joining an Alliance?

If you are considering joining an alliance, there are a number of issues to think about to make sure that the alliance is the right one for your organization, and that your organization is the right one for the alliance.

First, ask about your own organization

- What is the goal of our organization in this project? Is it similar to the goals of the other organizations?
- What skills can our organization bring to the alliance? What skills are complementary to ours for the projects we want to work on?
- What role does our organization want to play in the project? Is this where we can be most effective?
- Has our organization worked with any of these organizations before? If so, what has been our experience?
- Is our organization planning to have staff based on-site? If so, what specific skills and characteristics do these staff need to have to effectively implement the project? Do we have staff with these skills?
- How involved with administrative tasks does our organization want to be?
- Is this project a priority within our organization? Is this fact known to other organizations and are they satisfied with it?
- Is there anyone in our organization that would be an appropriate leader for the alliance or are we willing to follow the lead of another organization?

Then, ask about the alliance

- Is the alliance forming because of mutual interests, a grant, or some other reason? Are the rules of membership in the alliance clear?
- Is the project goal of the alliance clear?

- How many organizations will be involved in the alliance?
- What types of organizations are joining to form the alliance? Do the organizations in the alliance have similar or compatible institutional goals?
- Have the organizations or individuals in the organizations worked together before?
- Are there any skills needed for the project that are not present in any of the organizations?
- Does each organization know its role and is it satisfied with this division of labor and responsibility?
- Is there a clear process identified for how decisions are made in the alliance and who will make them?
- Is there a strong, capable leader of the alliance? Is there consensus on who will lead?
- Where is the funding for the alliance coming from? How much is it? How is it distributed within the alliance? Will there be technical assistance provided with the funding?

If you are a national or local NGO, ask ...

- Does our organization have the skills to implement the project in the field or does it need assistance from another organization? Is there a member of the alliance that is willing and able to provide us with the necessary technical assistance?
- Are there other skills that we can gain from our participation in the alliance?
- Are there larger organizations that are willing to work with our organization in a supportive role and give our organization authority in decision making for the project?
- Does our organization have the administrative capacity for the project or do we need to find another organization to handle that?
- Does our organization want to work with international organizations or

would we prefer to work with other national or local organizations?

- Are the organizations that our organization wants to work with considered credible by the government, other NGOs, and other stakeholders?

If you are a national NGO, ask ...

- Is our organization looking to gain skills in this alliance or is it prepared to strengthen the skills of other organizations?
- Does our organization want to work with an organization closer to the site or be more directly involved in the implementation of field activities?
- Does our organization have the credibility in the community to work without a local partner?
- Does our organization have the capacity and credibility to deal with the government and other NGOs effectively?

If you are an international NGO, ask ...

- How can we help the alliance define and maintain clear project goals?
- What role would our organization best play in the alliance? How can we help the alliance clearly define the roles of all member organizations?
- Will the home office of our organization relinquish control over project management and let programmatic decisions in the alliance be made by those managing field activities?
- Does the organization that will be the primary implementing organization have the skills and credibility to work at the project site?
- Are there gaps in the technical skills needed for the project in the other organizations? Does our organization have the capacity to help train other member organizations?
- Does our organization have the capacity and credibility to deal with the government effectively if necessary?

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About the Biodiversity Support Program

The Biodiversity Support Program (BSP) is a consortium of World Wildlife Fund, The Nature Conservancy, and World Resources Institute, funded by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID). BSP's mission is to promote conservation of the world's biological diversity. We believe that a healthy and secure living resource base is essential to meet the needs and aspirations of present and future generations.

A Commitment to Learning

BSP's Analysis and Adaptive Management Program and our Communications Program work together to produce the *Lessons from the Field* series as part of AAM's Doing Conservation Better Library. Our communications activities are designed to share what we are learning through our field and research activities. To accomplish this, we try to analyze both our successes and our failures. We hope our work will serve conservation practitioners as a catalyst for further discussion, learning, and action so that more biodiversity is conserved. Our communications programs include print publications, Web sites, presentations, and workshops.

BSP Web Site and Listserv

We invite you to visit www.BSPonline.org to learn more about BSP, even after the program closes down in 2001. Through June 2001, you can receive e-mail updates through the Web site. To join our listserv, click on **stay informed** and send us your e-mail address. We'll keep you posted on project highlights, upcoming events, and our latest publications.

Ordering BSP Publications

Many of our print publications are available online at www.BSPonline.org. On the home page, click on **publications**. You can view publications online or order copies to be sent to you. You may also contact us by mail, phone, or fax to request copies.

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